

## **LB 634: Nebraska Wildfire Control Act of 2013**

### **Briefing Sheet**

2012 was the worst wildland fire year on record in Nebraska, with nearly 500,000 acres burned, 65 structures lost and at least \$12 million in suppression costs. Higher temperatures, intense drought, increased forest fuel loads and the spread of eastern Redcedar (*by 38,000 new acres/year*) have created an explosive potential for very large wildfires across the state. These megafires occur far more frequently than in the past, spread and grow very rapidly immediately upon ignition and burn over large areas for weeks. They are difficult to control, overwhelm local suppression capacity, cost enormous amounts of money, and put lives and property of residents, visitors and emergency response personnel at great risk.

Dangerous wildfire now threatens lives, property, communities and infrastructure statewide, including the Pine Ridge, Niobrara Valley, Wildcat Hills, Central Loess Hills, Loess Canyons, along the Platte, Republican, Missouri and Niobrara Rivers and many developing areas in eastern Nebraska. Whole communities, recreation areas and camps, housing developments and individual homes (Long Pine, Valentine, Chadron, Devils Nest, Wildcat Hills, Morse Bluffs, etc.) are at increasingly severe risk. Much of the Pine Ridge forest ecosystem has been lost to repeated catastrophic wildfires. The Niobrara Valley forests are now beginning to experience similar catastrophic losses to wildland fire.

#### **LB 634 Goals:**

1. Substantially improve the protection of life and property across Nebraska by increasing the capacity of volunteer fire districts.
2. Help to reduce wildfire size and intensity through rapid and effective initial aerial attack, better trained firefighters, improved fire suppression equipment, and expanded forest fuels reduction activities.
3. Reduce costs charged to the state's emergency fund for wildfire suppression by keeping fires small.
4. Mitigate damage to watersheds caused by catastrophic wildland fire

#### **LB 634 Actions/Components:**

1. Contract with private aviation companies to place two single engine air tankers (SEATs) during the fire season at airports near Chadron and Valentine. These planes would provide rapid initial attack across a broad area of western Nebraska on both private and public lands, keeping fires small and less destructive.
2. Thin forests to reduce fuel loads, substantially reducing wildfire risk, intensity, and rate of the spread, and reduce risks to residents, communities and emergency personnel.
3. Provide expanded training programs for volunteer firefighters, private landowners, and communities in order to increase fire suppression effectiveness and safety;
4. Develop a Nebraska-based Type 3 incident management team that would serve as a comprehensive resource to augment and help manage large wildfire operations.
5. Expand the federal excess property programs managed by the Nebraska Forest Service to provide volunteer fire districts with fire suppression equipment.
6. Rehabilitate forest lands that have been destroyed by wildfires.